



CONTACT: Doug Stone
Jan Agee

916/657-3027
FAX 916/657-5101

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PHYSICAL FITNESS RESULTS ANNOUNCED FOR CALIFORNIA'S STUDENTS

SACRAMENTO--"The physical fitness of all California children is important both for their own health and for our state's well-being," State Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin said today, as she reported the results of physical fitness testing for students in grades five, seven, and nine.

"This is the first time in over five years that we have had a statewide look at the fitness level of our students, and the picture we see is not what we hoped it would be," Eastin said. "Results showed that most students at the three grade levels were not as fit as they should be to enjoy healthy and productive lives."

Last spring, more than a million students participated in statewide physical performance testing re-established by Assembly Bill 265 in 1995. The law requires that school districts administer a physical fitness test, designated by the State Board of Education, to all fifth, seventh, and ninth graders annually. Senate Bill 896, approved in 1998, requires the California Department of Education to report results to the Governor and legislature at least once every two years. The designated test used was the Fitnessgram, developed by the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research.

The Fitnessgram in 1999 assessed six major fitness areas that included aerobic capacity (cardiovascular endurance), body composition (percent of body fat), abdominal strength and endurance, trunk strength and flexibility, upper body strength and endurance, and overall flexibility. A number of testing options (see Attachment I) were provided so that all students, including those with special needs, had the opportunity to participate. Students who were not physically able to take the entire test were given as much of the test as their conditions allowed. Results were reported according to standards that had been established for each area of the test. Students were evaluated using standards appropriate for their age and sex.

“Results showed that only 20 percent of the students in grade five and nine met all six fitness standards, and 22 percent of the students in grade seven met all six standards,” Eastin said. “Students must meet the minimum fitness standards for all six areas of the test to be considered fit, and about 80 percent of students in the grades tested could not achieve that goal.”

A further breakdown of the results showed that 40 to 50 percent of students across grades five, seven, and nine did not meet the minimum fitness standard for aerobic capacity. Thirty percent or more did not meet the standards for body composition, upper body strength, and flexibility. The strongest showing across all grades was in trunk strength, where only 13 to 20 percent of the students did not meet the minimum standard. The second strongest area was abdominal strength, where 18 to 20 percent did not meet the standard.

Subgroup data showed that in grades five and seven, more girls than boys met all six fitness standards, but more boys than girls met the standards in grade nine. Across all grades, girls outscored boys in flexibility and body composition, but boys moved ahead in upper body strength.

“Schools can use these results to evaluate their physical education and health programs, and teachers can use the data to set specific goals for their students,” Eastin said. “Parents also can play an important role in promoting physical activities and healthy lifestyles at home. Raising the fitness level of all students is everybody’s responsibility. Our students must be physically fit to perform well academically,” Eastin concluded.

The 1999 fitness results for schools, districts, counties, and the state will be reported by the end of this month on the California Department of Education Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/cilbranch/sca>. No individual student data will be reported on the Internet.

For more information, contact the California Department of Education, Standards and Assessment Division at (916) 657-3011.

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